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Support Bulletin Article
30 Sept. 1958

MANAGEMENT TOOLS

CUTTING CORRESPONDENCE COSTS

a Correspondence management was never intended for the illiterate. Anyone who can read and sign his name is the customer. Correspondence management exists to improve correspondence practices. To do this in our organization, three targets were set up: *because* *and standardat!*

1. Establish uniform standards and procedures.
2. Provide economical substitutes for costly practices.
3. Promote effective writing.

STANDARDS

The first target includes correspondence standards for:

1. Simplicity in presentation
2. Accuracy in content
3. Correctness and uniformity in appearance
4. Effectiveness in style and tone
5. Efficiency in procedures

These basic controls at the point of creation are carefully detailed in the organization handbook "Correspondence Style and Procedures,"

This handbook is for use at headquarters. Specific instructions on style and procedures for field use are excerpted and sent to the field stations by their headquarters officers. Special cable and dispatch procedures are also provided for headquarters and field in such special handbooks and guides *writing* as "Cable Handbook," and "Dispatch Procedures," CSI _____.

As the organization grew, the convenience of standardized style and uniform procedures became more apparent and were adopted by more and more offices. Any headquarters office still uncertain about the established correspondence standards for style, format, stationery, signatures, addresses, routing, copies, methods, and so forth, should supply its clerical and secretarial staff with a copy of _____. This guide should be kept as immediately available as the dictionary, for all of the staff, every workday without exception.

SUBSTITUTES

The second target has brought about several dramatic improvements in

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many organization offices. This second target is sighted through the economic truth, "point of diminishing return," which is especially applicable in correspondence management. For instance, personalized correspondence has its advantages up to a point; but, beyond that point the advantages diminish and often can become detriments.

In correspondence there are several substitutes which become practical and economical at a certain point in office operations. Some substitutes ~~are~~ are as simple as a telephone call, instead of a letter. Others are equally easy, such as using Transmittal Slips, Record Sheets, and endorsements on documents instead of creating another letter.

FORM LETTERS

The most profitable returns in correspondence time and money have been ~~realized~~ in offices that ~~have~~ substituted forms and form letters for formal correspondence. Forms and form letters are preprinted and stocked in advance of use. Any printed paper with space to be filled in is a form. Form letters include business-style letters, memorandums, postal cards, and so forth. The guide book "Form Letters" details ways to use them to your advantage. For example this chart adapted from that Guide illustrates that a form letter is economically appropriate if the message:

1. is routine business or information
2. is not personal
3. does not bring grief or disappointment to the reader
4. has 5 lines and is used more than 30 times per month, or
 - 10 " " " " " 20 " " " "
 - 15 " " " " " 15 " " " "
 - 20 " " " " " 10 " " " "

Composed correspondence is 90 percent more costly than form letters. Form letters have the added advantage of: Promptness, accuracy, and conciseness. Whether an officer is concerned with his budget or operating efficiency he should investigate the practicability of form letters.

GUIDE LETTERS

In a strict sense, guide letters which are individually typed from samples, guides (such as Correspondex), or patterns, although standard in content, are not considered form letters. Guide letters are not printed in advance. They are typed to look and read exactly like individually dictated letters, yet they take a fraction as much of the officer's ~~time~~ and typist's time and effort. The booklet "Guide Letters" details the procedures for evaluating an office's need for the system as well as how to plan, develop, and use it.

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NEW EQUIPMENT

Substitutes are not always inexpensive. To eliminate an inefficient and costly correspondence procedure, the ultimate savings and efficiency is the goal of correspondence management. Perhaps a study of your correspondence workload will reveal a need for dictating machine procedures or other elaborate electric communication machines. Correctly used, even the most expensive installations have proven to be the most economical method. Experts are available to evaluate the needs and assist in determining the feasibility of certain correspondence equipment and procedures to cut costs or improve procedures. For example, dictating machines save the time of two people, both the secretary and the typist, because while she is taking dictation she cannot type ^{some} other work. Using the diction machine is a big savings, but in other offices an officer dictating to a secretary rather than writing in long hand is the big savings.

GOOD WRITING

The third target is more delicate than it is difficult. Reams of literature, such as the booklet "Plain Letters" and hours of formal study, such as the training course "Effective Writing," are available to employees seeking self-improvement in the writing of correspondence.

Unfortunately, quality in writing is a personal thing ~~which~~ ^{that} cannot be legislated for or against. Anyone can take pen in hand and write a letter. If he does it well the reader and subject matter are fortunate. Even the organization's end product benefits. ~~If he can't write, he shouldn't until he can.~~ ^{This} would save much ~~waste~~ money and time in supplies, files, secretaries and officers ~~if more writers tried to improve.~~

However, since "even his best friend won't tell him," correspondence management must try a thousand ways to tactfully urge him to improve. Naturally we don't mean you, but run through this check list on correspondence skills and see how many "No" answers you have:

1. Are most of your letters less than a page long?
2. Is your average sentence less than 22 words?
3. Do you keep paragraphs short--less than 10 lines?
4. Do you avoid beginning letters with "Reference is made..." or "This office is in receipt of your letter..."?
5. Do you know some good techniques for beginning letters naturally and conversationally?
6. Can you think of 4 words that will take the place of "however?"
7. Do you paraphrase items instead of playing safe and quoting them?

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8. Do you avoid pat phrases like "records of this Bureau indicate?"
9. Do you use personal pronouns freely, particularly "you?"
10. Are your letters written in the first person (we (I) shall appreciate) rather than the third person (this Bureau will)?
11. Do you prefer active verbs (the manager read the) to the passive ones (the letter was read by)?
12. Do you answer a question before explaining the answer?

Each "No" answer indicates a correspondence weakness. There are many more helpful checks in the booklet "Plain Letters." A method worth trying for letter improvement is: Think before you write and apply the four "S" formula--Simplicity, Sincerety, Shortness, Strength.

Here is another worthwhile check list anyone can use to determine the "mailability" of a letter:

1. STATIONERY

Standard Size

Neat with no wrinkles or rips

Second page and envelopes match original

2. LAYOUT

Picture frame look

Balanced margins

Proper paragraphing

3. APPEARANCE

Good erasures, no smudges

Clean type, even touch

Fresh ribbon

4. STYLE

Follows official standards

No unusual abbreviations

No needless punctuation

5. ACCURACY

Each sentence a complete thought

Correct word divisions and spelling

Correct date, address, attachments, and signature

You will have to correct your "no" answers before that letter is "mailable."

CUTTING COSTS

The ideas presented here not only will cut costs, they will improve the quality of your product as well. Many factors in the creation, use, and disposition of correspondence is within the responsibility of the Records Management Staff and its correspondence management office. It is impossible to list all of them.

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to detail every facet of the vast problem to be faced and the
~~maximum~~ improvement techniques developed in the field of correspondence.
~~The organization must make maximum budget savings in this area.~~

The extent of the ultimate budget savings and operation efficiency
that is possible by an effective correspondence program is ~~immense~~.
~~This~~ certainly warrants the immediate, serious consideration of
every official in the organization.

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TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE
		1 Oct. 58
TO: [redacted]		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	
REMARKS: Jim: Here is the requested feature article on correspondence management. [redacted] may not accept 4 pages, and yet he might. He did before. Good luck--I hope it adequately covers all the points you wanted. <i>Carbon also for editing or file.</i>		
FROM: [redacted]		
ROOM NO.	EXTENSION	

FORM NO. 241
1 FEB 55

REPLACES FORM 36-8
WHICH MAY BE USED.

GPO : 1957-O-439445

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